

PART I

The Colonial Era, 1600–1760



CHAPTER ONE

The Imperial Gaze: Native American, African American, and Colonial Women in European Eyes

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ALGONQUIAN women in New England, wrote William Wood in 1634, were “more loving, pitiful, and modest, mild, provident, and laborious than their lazy husbands.” Wood imagined that oppressed Indian women would gladly embrace European gender roles with their presumably lighter burdens of female domesticity. Commenting in 1657 on enslaved African women in Barbados, Richard Ligon remarked that their breasts “hang down below their Navals,” and “when they stoop at their common work of weeding, they hang almost to the ground, that at a distance you would think they had six legs.” Ligon’s vision of nearly deformed African women supported his belief that they, like beasts, were fit for grueling labor. Pennsylvania was a healthy place, one promotional tract claimed in 1698, in which transplanted English women proved remarkably fertile: “Barrenness among women [is] hardly to be heard of,” and “seldom any young Married Woman but hath a Child in her Belly, or one upon her Lap.” Colonial women who settled there would be as fruitful as the land. Written in three different places at different times, these descriptions did not simply mirror their subjects. Rather, images of women were part of complex and often contradictory efforts by colonizers to understand and control intercultural contact in the “New World.” (Wood cited in Smits 1982: 293; Ligon cited in Morgan 1997: 168; Pennsylvania tract cited in Klepp 1998: 919.)

How did Europeans’ perceptions of Native American, African, and European women influence the project of settlement and expansion in colonial America? Historians have begun to mine well-known writings of European explorers and settlers in search of something often previously overlooked: representations of women and the role these images played in colonizers’ perceptions and practices of conquest. The “linguistic turn” in academia in the 1980s and 1990s, with its attention to language as an aspect of power relations rather than as a transparent and neutral means of communication,

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encouraged the interrogation of primary sources as suspect informants. Along with anthropologists and literary critics, historians have come to understand verbal descriptions as embedded in and constitutive of (rather than apart from and simply descriptive of) social relations between different groups. The critical reassessment of historical sources has in turn boosted research on the perceptions of colonial writers, the cultural predispositions of their “gaze,” and the sometimes fantastic images they projected of the would-be colonized. As a result, some historians have focused on the way colonizers deployed images of women in an effort to promote and justify colonial conquest. This line of inquiry is still relatively new, and some of the most relevant scholarship to combine analyses of gender, imperialism, and imagery of colonized women is based on literary analysis or on historical and anthropological examinations of nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonial contexts. This essay, however, focuses on perceptions of women in or migrating to British North America to explore what power relations underlay colonizers’ descriptions of “other” women, and the role that particular images of women played in the process of colonization.

Representations of Native American Women

Many English readers first encountered “America” in the form of an allegory. By the 1570s, America appeared in numerous European books and maps as an Indian woman wearing only a feathered headdress. In the famous engraving of “America” by Theodor Galle, for example (ca. 1580 after a drawing by Jan van der Straet), America appears as a native woman on a hammock, aroused from her slumber by Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian explorer whose name, in feminine form, would become attached to the continents of the western hemisphere (see plate 1). The conquistador, fully clad and armed, plants his banner into the ground with the same firm assertion with which he will stake claim to the region and the people in it. As Louis Montrose explains, the representation of America as a semi-nude and reclining woman does much to naturalize the conquest as part of the predictable relations of men to women and of civilized people to “savages.” In images such as these, the “New World” is gendered female, and its exploration and conquest is made sexual. The land, like the women in it, is depicted as there for the taking, available to any male colonist intrepid enough to grasp the prize. The scene of cannibalism in the background renders America savage (despite the figure’s idealized European looks), suggesting that the pending conquest will banish savagery at the same time that it appropriates both the female figure and the land she represents.

Similarly, as Annette Kolodny has shown, Europeans commonly described the country’s physical terrain in gendered terms that conveyed the appropriateness of its annexation. Descriptions of a “virgin land,” one untouched by human agency and awaiting its own awakening (and profitable exploitation), did much to erase symbolically the presence of Indians whose agricultural practices and routine forest burnings had long marked the countryside. Portrayals of a sparsely inhabited and entirely “unimproved” land falsely suggested that only small numbers of nomadic Indians roamed the area with merely spurious claims to the region. The descriptions of a land lying in wait, its riches as yet unexplored because Indian men were incapable of the



Plate 1 America. Engraving (ca. 1580) by Theodor Galle after a drawing by Jan van der Straet (ca. 1575). Courtesy of the Burndy Library, Dibner Institute for the History of Science and Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

deed, served as a sexual metaphor that appealed to European men. William Strachey, for example, argued that the English could much better exploit “those benefits . . . which god hath given unto them [Indian men], but evolved and hid in the bowells and womb of their Land (to them barren, and unprofitable, because unknowne)” (cited in Brown 1996: 57). Sir Walter Raleigh went so far as to describe Guiana as “a country that hath yet her maydenhead, never sackt, turned, nor wrought, the face of the earth hath not bene torne, nor the vertue and salt of the soyle spent by manurance . . . It hath never bene entred by any armie of strength, and never conquered or possessed by any Christian prince” (Montrose 1992: 154). Anne McClintock uses the term “porno-tropics” to describe the “long tradition of male travel as an erotics of ravishment.” For centuries, European travel accounts “libidinally eroticized” Africa, the Americas, and Asia as places of male conquest (McClintock 1995: 22). The comments by Strachey and Raleigh can stand in for countless examples that illustrate the point made by Joan C. Scott that forms of social inequality may be modeled on gendered relations of power, whether or not these social relations expressly involve men and women. Justifications of conquest that depicted the land and its indigenous inhabitants as passive and submissive (and hence

feminized) implied that colonial relations of domination were as natural, obvious, and appropriate as Europeans presumed hierarchical gender relations to be. Acts of conquest framed in gendered terms served to naturalize relations of power, with Indian peoples and their environment portrayed as the feminized “Other.”

Peter Hulme notes, however, that on occasion the feminization could be strategically reversed, as in Samuel Purchas’s 1625 account of the Indian massacre of Virginia colonists in 1622: “But when Virginia was violently ravished by her owne ruder Natives, yea, her Virgin cheeks dyed with the bloud of three Colonies . . . the stupid Earth seems distempered with such bloody potions and cries that shee is ready to spue out her Inhabitants” (Hulme 1986: 160). In this case, the “virgin” land was raped by its own natives, and the spilt blood was that of the colonies, which are, in the process, identified with the ravaged land. The colonists have become the natural residents, the passive victims of native violence, while the Indians are spewed out. Gendered relations of colonialism could appear in different forms, but they routinely served to justify the use of colonial force (in this case, as retaliation) against the Indians.

As part of the eroticization of conquest, native women often appeared as figures of deviant and excessive sexuality. Amerigo Vespucci, for example, described a “shameful” custom in which Indian women, “being very libidinous, make the penis of their husbands swell to such a size as to appear deformed.” The women accomplish this with the bite of a poisonous snake, he said, though as a result many husbands “lose their virile organs and remain eunuchs” (Montrose 1992: 144). The inversion of a European gender hierarchy, apparent in the image of depraved and sexually violent Indian women and of men willing to tolerate emasculation for the pleasure of their wives, again signaled the “savagery” that to Europeans made moot any native claims to the land and its resources.

Vespucci’s account sounds entirely fabricated, but actual gender roles and sexual mores astonished European newcomers and fueled perceptions of Indian incivility. As Kathleen Brown explains, ethnic identities stemmed in part from “the confrontations of culturally-specific manhoods and womanhoods” (Brown 1995: 27). Many Native American groups, for example, provided visitors with female bedfellows. Women mediators offered not only sexual companionship but also rudimentary language skills and lessons in local customs that facilitated trade relations. Because these arrangements served an overtly diplomatic function, Indian leaders debated the merits of such associations before giving their assent. By contrast, European norms defined only marital sex as acceptable for women. Although women often transgressed sexual rules and Europeans in fact accommodated premarital and extramarital sex to a considerable degree, prescriptive mores defined women’s nonmarital sexual activity as profligacy. Some Europeans imputed to sexually available Indian women a mercenary nature; others described them as innocents in a precivilized Eden. Whether perceived as calculating or naive, Indian women’s sexual relations with outsiders appeared to Europeans as acts of blatant promiscuity. Colonial perceptions of sexual “deviance” contributed to a rhetoric of rightful dispossession: if civilized women were chaste, then lascivious Indian women (and tolerant native men) further proved that Indians in general (often lumped together in European minds) were “uncivilized” and therefore without legitimate claim to the land.

Despite the derisive tone in many accounts of Indian women, a great deal of admiration also infused colonial depictions of their bodies and behavior. Women were described not only as promiscuous creatures, but as gorgeous ones as well, thus “eroticizing the middle ground” between European men and Indian women (Godbeer 1999). Margarita Zamora notes that “eroticization of the feminine implies *both* desire and disdain,” and she explains that in the context of a European gender hierarchy, Indian women could be idealized and denigrated at the same time, without contradiction, while reasserting the European male viewer’s sense of superiority over the object of his gaze (Zamora 1990/1991: 146). From their first encounter, colonists ogled scantily clad Indians, fantasized about native women as sexual objects, and produced minutely detailed descriptions of their physical appearance. John Lawson, for example, a surveyor in the Carolinas, wrote of Indian women that:

when young, and at Maturity, they are as fine-shap’d Creatures (take them generally) as any in the Universe. They are of a tawny Complexion; their Eyes very brisk and amorous; their Smiles afford the finest Composure a Face can possess; their Hands are of the finest Make, with small long Fingers, and as soft as their Cheeks; and their whole Bodies of a smooth Nature. They are not so uncouth or unlikely, as we suppose them; nor are they Strangers or not Proficients in the soft Passion. (Lawson 1984 [1709]: 189–90)

By contrast, Lawson (and others) portrayed Indian men as effete and without ardor, and hence unable to satisfy libidinous Indian women. “*Indian* Men are not so vigorous and impatient in their Love as we are,” he wrote. “Yet the Women are quite contrary, and those *Indian* Girls that have convers’d with the *English* and other *Europeans*, never care for the Conversation of their own Countrymen afterwards” (Lawson 1984 [1709]: 193). In this depiction, feminized Indian men offered no competition to lusty Englishmen for the sexual interest of native women. This notion of an absent sex drive in Indian men, combined with the belief that they failed to make proper and profitable use of the land, reinforced a colonial masculinity that expressed its manhood in an impulse for sexual as well as geographical conquest.

Karen Kupperman argues that English concerns with gender roles and class relations among Indians initially outstripped an interest in racial difference. Colonial leaders were especially keen on ascertaining that Indians had gender roles and distinctions of status (made visible in posture, gestures, clothing, and hair styles) that affirmed the social hierarchy in England and its supposedly natural underpinnings of gender and class. Such hierarchies among Indians also seemed to suggest that “civilizing” the natives would not be too difficult. Consequently, contradictory images evolved that included not only effete Indian men but also noble, dignified savages who formed a natural aristocracy. Skin color was not yet as important as other markers of difference; only when Indians proved unwilling to assimilate did colonials assert immutable categories of racial difference.

For a long time, in fact, no consensus prevailed among the English as to the cause, permanence, or even precise shade of Indians’ complexions. Captain Arthur Barlowe

reported in 1585 that Indians on the Carolina coast were “of a colour yellowish,” while other travelers described Native Americans as tawny, brown, olive, russet, or copper. Many, like John Smith, believed that Indians “are borne white” and then purposefully darken their skin. James Adair, who lived among the Cherokee and Chickasaw for many decades, proclaimed “that the Indian colour is not natural; but that the external difference between them and the whites, proceeds entirely from their customs and method of living, and not from any inherent spring of nature.” North America’s “parching winds, and hot sun-beams . . . necessarily tarnish their skins with the tawny red colour,” while the constant application of bear’s grease “mixt with a certain red root” produces in a few years “the Indian colour in those who are white born.” Europeans could change their skin color as well. Adair knew “a Pennsylvanian, a white man by birth, and in profession a christian, who, by the inclemency of the sun, and his endeavours of improving the red colour, was tarnished as deep an Indian hue, as any of the camp, though they had been in the woods only the space of four years.” In these descriptions, color was only skin deep, the result of exposure to the elements combined with applied color. (Barlowe 1966 [1584–5]: 107; Smith cited in Kupperman 1997: 207; Adair cited in Williams 1930 [1775]: 4.)

Malleable categories of racial difference, however, meant that erotic images of Indian women could create a “dilemma for a male colonist, as expression of the erotic may signal his own lapse into savagery” (Robertson 1996: 561). Some feared that intermarriage with Indians – especially among the lower ranks of colonists – would lead to complete assimilation to Indian ways. Others, hoping instead that Indian women would become anglicized and in the process bring native lands under colonial control, made gendered distinctions of race, depicting Indian women as lighter-skinned than Indian men. William Bartram, for example, believed that Cherokee women had a “complexion rather fairer than the men’s.” Englishmen fantasized not only that Indian women were paler than native men, but also that they preferred to bear white children. Lawson believed the “handsome” Congaree women of South Carolina “esteem[ed] a white Man’s Child much above one of their getting” (Bartram cited in Waselkov and Braund 1995: 150–1; Lawson 1984 [1709]: 35–6). Men like Bartram and Lawson projected not only that native women preferred white children, but also that the descendents of an English–Indian union would eventually approximate the skin color of the white ancestor. Those who promoted intermarriage as a means of infiltrating Indian culture and acquiring land thus downplayed differences between Indian women and English men, racializing Native Americans in ways that served an ideology of conquest.

The discourse about intercultural unions explicitly addressed concerns about class. Lawson, who supported colonial intermarriage with Indians, made it clear that only “ordinary People, and those of a lower Rank” should do so (Lawson 1984 [1709]: 244–5). The well-to-do considered lower-class English people closer to a savage state anyway. In an English culture obsessed with genealogy and bloodlines, the lower orders could hardly claim purity of blood, nor could they necessarily insist on their own “whiteness” as the concept was developing. Some well-heeled colonists assumed that Indians could be no worse than the already crude members of the lower ranks.

Virginia slaveholder William Byrd, for example, compared Indian women favorably with the English women transported (often from workhouses) to the fledgling Virginia colony, and he felt he could “safely venture to say, the Indian women would have made altogether as Honest wives for the first Planters, as the Damsels they us’d to purchase from aboard the Ships” (Byrd 1829: 120–2). But as race gradually took on fixed qualities and “redness” came to connote permanent degradation, English ideas about assimilation also changed, reflecting the shift toward more entrenched assumptions about innate difference. As the balance of power in intercultural relations shifted to colonial advantage, so too did depictions of voluptuous and eager Indian maidens give way to more standard images of primitive and dirty drudges.

Images of African Women

While images of Indian women fluctuated considerably over the colonial era and shifted according to political expediency, European depictions of African women appear to have stabilized earlier into a negative stereotype. Winthrop Jordan details Europeans’ interest in Africans from the mid-sixteenth century on, and he notes longstanding assumptions of primitive and oversexed African women and men. Women were described as lascivious and crude, with overheated passions, while African men (in contrast to effete Native American men) were thought to be lustful and endowed with immense sexual organs. These images of African men, Jordan says, reveal European men’s anxiety about them as sexual competitors and at the same time implied that white men exercised civilized sexual self-restraint. Other scholars of English culture have developed more explicitly the ways in which images of Africans shaped the identity of English men and women as “white.” Kim Hall’s examination of English literature, painting, and material culture from 1550 to 1640 reveals the pervasive use of racialized language and “tropes of blackness” by which English people created identities for themselves as white women and men. Felicity Nussbaum shows how eighteenth-century English novels invented the African woman as “inscrutable and sexually amorphous.” Nussbaum argues that upper-class English women imagined English servants and prostitutes as aligned with “savage” African women, while their own monogamous and middle-class maternity helped “to consolidate the national cultural identity” (Nussbaum 1995: 3, 74). Eighteenth-century literature thus braided together anxieties about female sexual propriety, racial difference, class distinctions, and national identity.

Historians are beginning to focus on other written sources to explore how images of African women interacted with European culture, identity, and an ideology of colonialism. Travel accounts differ from novels and plays in that they purport to be accurate reports of people and places the author has seen, but as Mary Louise Pratt explains, travelogues, like natural histories, framed other peoples in ways that aided the colonial enterprise as well. The language of natural science employed by European observers encompassed new lands and peoples within a homogenizing scientific framework, giving readers the sense that they could easily control unfamiliar people. Jennifer Morgan’s analysis of travel writing from the sixteenth through the late

eighteenth centuries demonstrates some of the “negative symbolic work” that representations of black women performed for readers in early modern England. The female African body appeared in travel literature as “both desirable and repulsive, available and untouchable, productive and reproductive, beautiful and black.” These contradictory images of black women as both mothers and monsters marked the edges of the familiar (maternity) and the strange (monstrosity), creating a discourse of racial difference that was “deeply imbued with ideas about gender and sexual difference” (Morgan 1997: 169–70). In particular, depictions of women who shamelessly suckled their offspring in public with breasts so long they could be flung over their shoulders evoked images of animal teats (see plate 2). Furthermore, the belief that African women experienced painless childbirth made their reproduction (like their nursing) seem mechanical and effortless. Edward Long wrote in 1774 that black women in Jamaica “are delivered with little or no labour; they have therefore no more occasion for midwives than the female oran-outang, or any other wild animal” (ibid.: 189). Represented as both sexual and savage, African women appeared perfectly suited for the productive and reproductive labor of slavery. More studies on images of black women in sources purporting to be nonfiction will be a welcome contribution to the field. While there have been great gains in the social history of

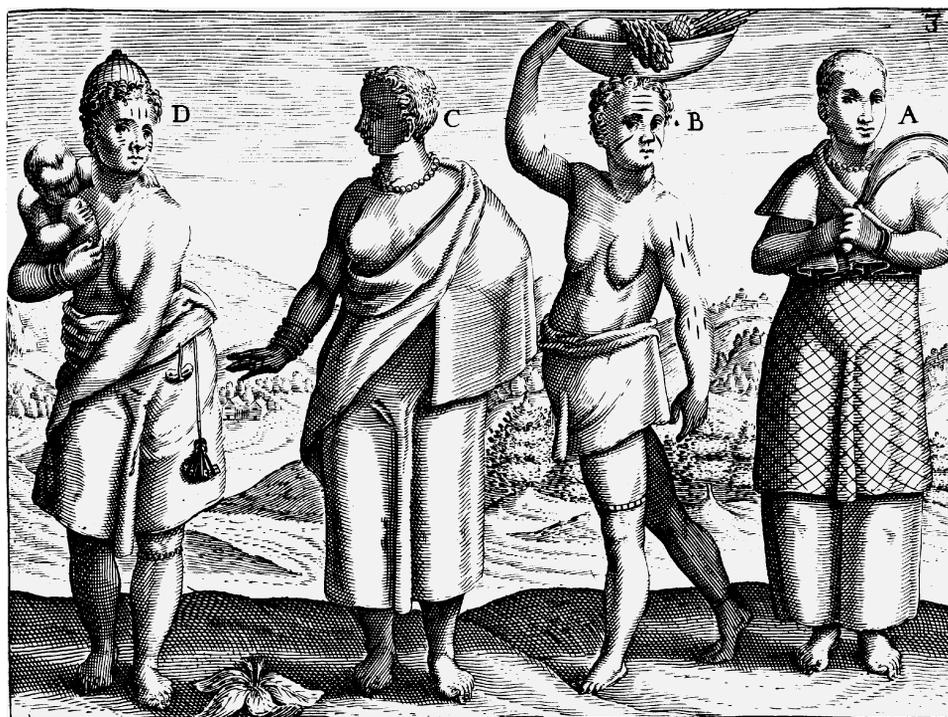


Plate 2 Women in Africa, from *Verum et Historicam Descriptionem Avriiferi Regni Guineaa*, in Theodor de Bry, *Small Voyages*, vol. 6 (Frankfurt am Main, 1604), plate 3. Courtesy of the John Work Garrett Library of the Johns Hopkins University.

African American women (especially regarding demography, work, culture, and families), there is relatively little scholarship on the way depictions of African and African American women helped shape the development of a British colonial system based substantially on slave labor and the international slave trade.

Also useful would be more research on how Native American, African, and English people were “raced” differently and in ways that took gender and social status into account. For example, the assumption of painless childbirth among African women contributed to the fiction of casual and emotionally detached reproduction on their part. By contrast, the pain-free childbirth projected onto Native American women raised the question of whether they were exempt from “Eve’s curse” and therefore existed in a special state untouched by “original sin.” When colonial women were said to have “very easy Travail in their Child-bearing,” as John Lawson put it, the image described robust, healthy women whose procreation was useful to the imperialist project. Why did the image of painless labor, projected onto different groups of women, create such striking *distinctions* among the women rather than similarities? Furthermore, why did the English imagine – well into the eighteenth century – that physical traits such as skin color among Indians were a matter of cultural (and so reversible) choices and that native women tended to be lighter than their male counterparts, while European assumptions about the fixity of the complexions of African men *and* women gained credence much earlier and despite the vast range in actual appearance of African peoples?

The answers likely reside in the specific and changing social contexts in which intercultural contact took shape. English inclinations to see Native Americans as less markedly or permanently different from themselves may have stemmed from early English dependence on Native Americans for subsistence and military alliances, and from the fact that Europeans initially failed to enslave Indians and so sought trade with them instead. Others, hoping the “New World” would prove a new Eden, found idealized Indians a useful foil against which to critique European corruption. Some Europeans believed Indians were the descendents of a “Lost Tribe of Israel” and thus biblical kin whose conversion and assimilation, they hoped, would come easily. By contrast, the degradation inherent in human bondage and the association of Africans with slavery, as well as centuries of contact between Europeans and Africans and an awareness of African resistance to easy assimilation, probably contributed to the earlier fixing of “blackness” with inferiority in chauvinistic English minds. David Brion Davis suggests, furthermore, that when people in England began to imagine themselves the world’s first free people and no longer vilified their own poor to the same degree, Africans were scapegoated and made to represent all that was degraded. Interestingly, the notion persists to this day that the “race” of Native Americans was somehow different (and less) than that of European Americans or, more especially, African Americans. Many scholars still describe white–Indian conflicts in the colonies as the result of cultural clashes, while the mere presence of African Americans transforms social antagonisms into problems of “race.” If African Americans still seem to have more “race” than European Americans or Native Americans, it is worth investigating what cultural and national mythologies are at work. Images of women as sexual objects, mothers, and laborers give especially valuable clues about the

construction of difference and the culturally specific meanings ascribed to gender, and race, and class.

Colonial Women as Caricatures and Colonizers

Images of white women also played an important part in shoring up colonial rule, although research on white women in the imperial gaze is still underdeveloped for colonial North America. Scholars of the second British Empire have done superb work on the ways in which white women – as rhetorically deployed symbolic figures and as actual persons – participated in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century colonization of Africa and South Asia. There the presence of colonial white women became crucial to the definition and patrol of racial borders, even as they could not hinder the illicit sexual liaisons that became the prerogative of ruling white men. As Ann Stoler and others have shown, contests involving white women's role in the sexual politics of a colonial social order can reveal much about the complex and gendered power relations between indigenous and colonial women and men. Regarding early America, we do know a great deal about the social history of white women and the social and legal regulations that circumscribed their lives. But we can uncover much more about how attempts to control the behavior of colonial women by projecting certain images of them meshed with larger imperialist aims and shaped social relations in the colonies.

English women in British North America had uneven and unstable reputations. From the beginning, many white women were depicted as lowly immigrants of suspect pedigree, often as former convicts and prostitutes. Such labels could effectively target wealthier women as well, calling into question the authority of their husbands to rule in the young colonies. Missionaries were quick to point out the moral flaws of colonial women, and they often despaired at the recalcitrance of would-be converts. In 1711, Reverend John Urmston, a missionary for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, bitterly described North Carolina as “a nest of the most notorious profligates upon earth. . . Women forsake their husbands come in here and live with other men.” Should the husband follow his wayward spouse to North Carolina, “then a price is given to the husband and madam stays with her Gallant,” the lovers spread a rumor that the husband is dead, “become Man and Wife make a figure and pass for people of worth and reputation [and] arrive to be of the first Rank and Dignity” (Urmston cited in Fischer 2002: 53). For Urmston, the prevalence of illicit sex in North Carolina served as a measure of the colony's low moral standing and lack of civility. As with Indian and African American women, white women's sexual misconduct became a barometer of social instability in the culture at large.

Unruly women found their most powerful embodiment in the figures of scolds and witches, and accused women were often those whose outspoken or independent behavior transgressed prescribed female deference to men. As Carol Karlsen and others have pointed out, however, allegations of witchcraft also stemmed from altercations over property, longstanding feuds between families, and the anxiety that infused a Puritan culture caught up in political turmoil and engaged in costly

Indian wars. In other words, cracks in colonial rule exacerbated concerns about unruly women and the impact of (real or imagined) female misconduct. Accusations of deviance served to keep women in line, reasserting the patriarchal order and underscoring the crucial links between domestic order and colonial control.

Counterposed images of colonial women appeared in female icons of fecundity and contented productivity. Such depictions sought to encourage the migration of families that would in turn consolidate colonial rule. John Lawson was one of many who promoted colonization by touting the healthful effects of the environment. Second-generation settlers in Carolina “are a straight, clean-limb’d People” whose children are “seldom or never troubled with Rickets; or those other Distempers, that the *Europeans*” endured. Lawson perceived a distinctly gendered pattern in this environment-induced return to a more natural state. European American men soon followed in the footsteps of “idle” male Indians (the “plentiful Country, makes a great many Planters very negligent,” Lawson explained), while Anglo women, like their Indian counterparts, “are the most Industrious Sex in that Place.” But in contrast to the image of the “squaw drudge,” transplanted Anglo women represented happy, healthy laborers. Lest prospective female immigrants worry that along with good health they would turn a few shades darker, Lawson added the following reassurance: the “Vicinity of the Sun makes Impression on the Men, who labour out of doors,” but the Anglo-American women who do not expose themselves to the weather are “often very fair” (Lawson 1984 [1709]: 90–1). Here again, skin color was made gender-specific, in the anticipation that immigrants would have concerns about the climate that combined issues of reproduction, class, and color. Images of white women in the imperial gaze were thus multiple and unfixed: depictions of harlots and scolds demanded increased vigilance and social control on the one hand, while portrayals of healthy fertility promised maternity and increase on the other.

White women’s reproductive behavior became an important part of the process of colonial settlement and expansion, which is why promotional literature touted women’s ability to bear children with ease in the colonies. Ruth Perry has shown that motherhood and breastfeeding in mid-eighteenth-century Britain were “colonized” and made into a service that women provided to the expanding and bellicose state. The growing concern with child mortality, Perry argues, resulted from England’s protracted and costly wars against France and the endless need for soldiers. In the American colonies, too, procreation became an imperial imperative, one that merged easily with the biblical mandate to “increase” and “multiply” (see plate 3). On the whole, however, the rather shrill English rhetoric of reproduction for the sake of the state, the movement against wet-nursing (having another woman breastfeed one’s child), and the concern to establish foundling hospitals to save the lives of abandoned orphans – these were less characteristic of the eighteenth-century colonies than they were of the London metropole. It would be interesting to know more precisely how colonial ideas about reproduction and the cultural significance of breastfeeding (that Marilyn Salmon explores) tied in with the expanding reach of the colonies, wars against the Indians, and developing ideas about race. How, in other words, did European American understandings of the links between gender and imperialism contrast with those in the “mother” country?



Plate 3 Reproduced by permission of the British Library.

Scholars have described the British experience in Ireland as a laboratory for conquest elsewhere. In the process of colonization, Irish people were depicted as a different and degraded race, with much the same language later applied to peoples in the Americas. It would be interesting to know whether and how images of women, in particular, translated across cultures. The sixteenth-century traveler and artist John White, for example, contrasted “Pict” women with those of tattooed Algonquins on the North Carolina coast, suggesting that “barbaric” Indians could experience the same civilizing process that ancient Britons had once undergone (see plate 4). One wonders how images of Irish women or poorer English women translated into other colonial contexts and were transformed there by local circumstances.

The “imperial gaze” is most easily found in the published perceptions of colonizing men, but Anglo-American women were imperialists as well, and they, too, projected images of African and Native American women. Women’s voices are harder to come by than those of men, but scholars have mined women’s narratives of Indian captivity for the way the authors positioned themselves *vis-à-vis* Indian “others.” Christopher Castiglia, for example, shows that although female authors of captivity narratives participated in a language of Indian “savagery,” they also often contradicted that image with examples of considerate and generous Indian hosts who cared for and eventually adopted them. Although framed by male editors as the tale of a helpless woman’s redemption through divine providence from uncivilized savages and her return to a superior culture, the narratives themselves, Castiglia argues, subverted that espoused message. They do so by showing the admirable agency of Indian women and of the captive herself, the malleability of cultural identity, and the suffocating limitations of English gender norms for the “redeemed” captives. It is precisely in those moments when the narrative undercuts the moral it is supposed to



Plate 4 Woman Pict, from Thomas Hariot, *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, as translated by Theodor de Bry, in *Occidentalischen Reisen*, volume I, part I, Frankfurt am Main, 1590. Courtesy of the James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota.

uphold that we can “hear” the woman’s authorial voice, Castiglia says, and this leads him to move beyond literary analysis to make claims about the racial ideology of white women captives. Without denying that profound cultural conflicts existed, Castiglia maintains that the captivity experience enabled colonial women to articulate a positive view of Indian women that subverted essentialist racial thinking and raised questions about aggressive colonial expansionism.

Other scholars emphasize the complicity of white women authors with imperialist renditions of Indians. According to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, for example, Mary Rowlandson, captured in Massachusetts in 1676 and held for nearly two months before she was ransomed, authorized herself in her bestselling 1682 narrative, *Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, as the symbol of a white and now feminized America. Presenting herself as the victimized and yet still sexually pure icon of the Puritan state,

Rowlandson promoted aggressive colonial expansion against unredeemable Indians. Ann Little focuses less on the symbolic imagery of women and more on the captives themselves to argue that English women imported their norms of orderly households into the captivity experience and judged their captors based on whether they established hierarchical families in the English style. This gave women captives less reason to speak highly of even those native women who cared for and protected them. Clearly, captivity narratives, straddling the line between fiction and nonfiction, provide complex and contradictory evidence of white women's perceptions of Indian women.

White women produced images of Africans as well. One Madam Knight, for example, recorded her daily impressions while traveling from Boston to New Haven in 1704. She found farmers in Connecticut "too Indulgent" with their slaves, "suffering too great familiarity from them, permitting th^m to sit at Table and eat with them, (as they say to save time,) and into the dish goes the black hoof as freely as the white hand" (Andrews 1990: 104–5). Traveling to the West Indies and then to the mainland colonies in 1774, Scottish traveler Janet Schaw, self-described as a "lady of quality," was shocked when she first saw the scarred backs of whipped slaves. She rationalized the whippings, however, choosing to believe that Africans' "Natures seem made to bear it, . . . whose sufferings are not attended with shame or pain beyond the present moment" (Andrews and Andrews 1934: 127). Schaw projected onto enslaved men and women a deficient ability to feel physical and emotional pain; in her construction, the whiplashes induced only a brief physical sensation without deeper emotional impact or meaning. This mindset enabled Schaw to justify the cruelty inherent in slavery and contributed to a racist understanding of enslaved laborers. While there are excellent studies on nineteenth-century travel writings by British women, it would be very useful to have more interpretive scholarship on traveling women in the colonies and their comments on the "other" women they encountered. The results would likely show neither an uncomplicated bonding with Indian and African "sisters," nor the same eroticized images of women so favored by imperialist men.

Looking Back

Some of the most interesting scholarship is also the most difficult: it explores the interaction between the imperial gaze and imperial rule, between the imagination and actual social relations, between the expectations created by a viewer's projections and the human exchange that confirmed or disrupted those views. Can historians use the imperial gaze to write about women's subjectivities? To seek the real women behind the images imposed on them is to explore the relationship between colonial rhetoric and the experience of colonization; it combines textual analysis with social and cultural history. Karen Robertson, for example, argues that in the gaps and silences of John Smith's accounts of Pocahontas we can see the Indian woman's counterpoint to his version of her, an alternative mindset not accommodated by Smith's narrative. Attempts like Robertson's are necessarily cautious and often inconclusive, leaving the reader wishing for more, but *not* to undertake the venture means

forfeiting a rare opportunity to go beyond image and convention. Worse, it makes the imperial gaze seem autonomous, as if it existed in a vacuum uninfluenced by the very people it interprets. As Klaus Neumann explains, “a critique of European colonial discourse must not be self-referential, but ought to take into account how European perceptions have been shaped both by what Europeans were conditioned to see and by what there was to be seen” (Neumann 1994: 119). Alice Conklin asks: “How might the gendered and racialized gaze of the colonizer be subverted in our own historical writing?” The trick, she says, is to alternate between accounts of western hegemony and the experience of subalterns (Conklin 1998: 155).

Just how to tack back and forth remains a matter of experimentation, but subaltern women in colonial America most certainly could and did look back at colonizing Europeans with a gaze of their own. Furthermore, women behaved purposefully to alter the images others had of them. Susan Klepp shows how white women reconfigured maternal imagery, distancing themselves from an identification with their pregnant state and focusing instead on the fetus as a separate being. They did so, Klepp says, in an effort to emphasize their rational capabilities over their reproductive ones. Perhaps some day we will have colonial-era accounts akin to Walter Johnson’s analysis of the way slaves in nineteenth-century slave markets molded the perceptions of prospective buyers and did what they could to disrupt sellers’ stories of an inadvertent or inevitable sale. Or maybe someone will excavate prerevolutionary sources to compare with Mia Bay’s discussion of African American ideas about race in the United States. Michael Gomez charts the way with his investigation of an African American ethnogenesis in the early South, and surely it will not be long before gender becomes more integrated into the analysis. Nancy Shoemaker shows how Native Americans co-opted “red” as a descriptive term for themselves even as they maintained alternative understandings of “race,” and Theda Perdue and others have demonstrated that with tenacious perseverance and creative adaptation to conditions wrought by colonialism, Native American women countered the image of themselves as “vanishing Indians.” Clearly, there is still much to explore regarding the multiple and gendered images of “self” and “other” that shaped intercultural contact and experiences of colonization.

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